

Shortgrass Drouth Concepts Flourish As Clouds Vanish

By Monte Noelke

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MERTZON — The Shortgrass County is returning to normal. After 12 months of “average” moisture, the area is once again turning into dry, dusty, brown-tinged ranchland. The slightest flurry of wind kicks up the dust. In the back of everyone’s mind lurks the fearful thought that this could be the start of another drouth.

Oldtimers claim that a rancher can withstand anything except being out of grass. And whenever the weather turns dry, Grey Whiskers can be counted on to start spinning yarns about how the cattle died off in 1919, or how bankers helped their wives wash for the public during such-and-such a dry scourge years and years ago.

But the modern concept of what is known as range management scorns all those old ranchers’ tales. Products of the jet age have been schooled by bright young range technicians. Government officers, supported by computerized cards, are able to prove that proper stocking rates, masterful pasture rotation schemes, and unrelenting brush control measure can prepare an outfit for a drouth that would turn back the scales on a full grown lizard.

Between these two arguments lies yet another review of the effects of drouth on the Shortgrass Country. The age group into which holders of this view fall would be hard to pinpoint, but I’d guess these hombres are somewhere in the era of life that the doctors call the weary forties and fifties. Without a doubt, their appraisal of drouth is the most logical of the three schools of thought.

In essence, these middle-of-the roaders say that in the entire spectrum of all Shortgrass drouths, only three minor inconveniences have been caused by lack of rain, and these have invariably turned into imagined hardships. They list these as follows: loss of all ordinary and unusual ranch income; depletion of any and every source of credit; and an estimated increase of some 500 percent in cash outflow over cash intake.

As simply as that, these gents show that drouths are actually mere bogeys, a form of mania that envelopes the ranch populace as the rain clouds disappear. It’s the same type of fear, for example, that makes our city brethren dread all-out atomic wars or such imaginary boogers as poisoned air, or the newly established custom of burning cities in the summertime.

Bigshot mind doctors probably have some complicated label for the disturbance. Out here we have always marked it off as the “subconscious dry fidgets.”

Now, with frost closed at hand, the three camps will soon start openly pushing their theories. The government men will be roaring up and down the highways, loaded down with paper-planned strategy. The old hands will be spreading their gloomy prophecies around the coffee houses. And the middle group will continue talking down the overdrawn ideas of drouth suffering.

One thing is for sure, wet or dry. A man has to learn, when he lives in the Shortgrass Country, that what might be gaff for the gander could turn out to be toxic for the goose.